EPODE

VIVIAN LOCKE ELLIS

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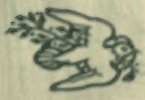

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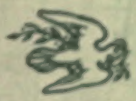
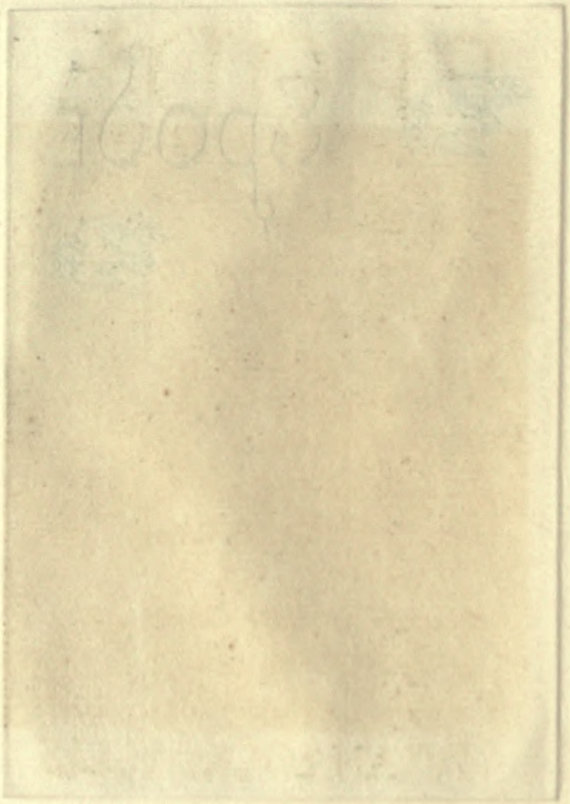


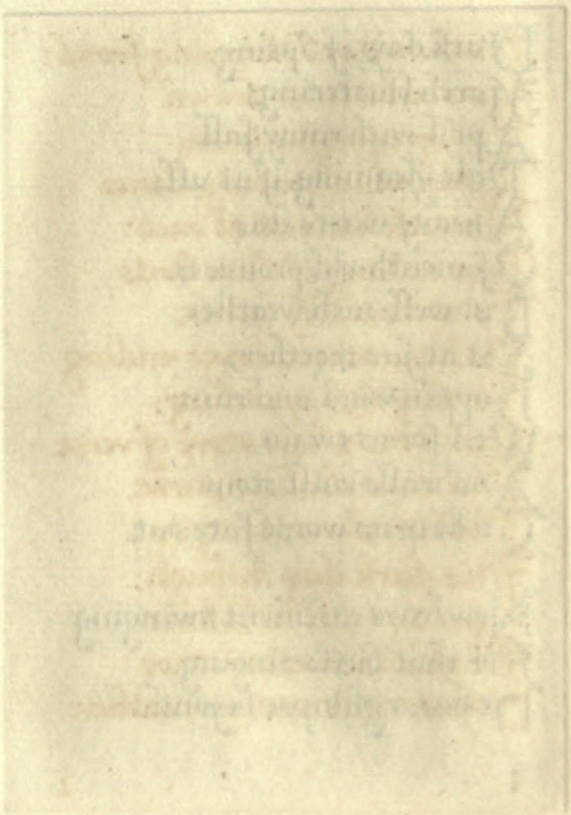


EPODE

VIVIAN LOCKE ELLIS

Dark days of Spring,
March blustering;
April with rainy fall
Pale gleaming, if at all;
A heavy waste it is
Of month-old promises.
But well, such weather,
Sit at fire together;
Happen wind and rain
Well for us twain,
And walls built stout
To keep no worse fate out.

Now leave casement swinging
For that bird's singing.
He has a glimpse beyond



Pine-cave and dripping frond;
Here is on business drawn
To hop upon the lawn:
Robin, what country-dunce
Nameth him not at once;
But talking of these birds
Is never end of words;
Pull-purse and never-ending
Is thriftless spending;
Here's one whose store of verse
Lies in no shallow purse,
Let him the talking do
This dark day through;
A pretty task he'll have
To pitch a sweeter stave
Tomorrow's sunny weather,

Dry wing and leaping feather,
Cloud blown away,
And like mid-May.

Ah, now you murmur, Pray,
Like what mid-May?
Bird-prophets are a snare,
In winter-days they were,
When old December's tune
Was like an air of June.
Granted this doubt of yours;
Tomorrow, say it pours;
My Bird-muse, granted he
Conjures with melody;
I have a parable
Shall conjure nigh as well.

Take then his song and mine
Remembered line by line,
And little shall we teach
But what the heart may reach,
No matter bring to birth
But what doth live on earth,
Doth live and never die
Though we have passed it by.
Heaven-born, my country-song
Let sing, 'tis not for long;
Soon unto other mood,
Perhaps to solitude
Of my companion dear,
I shall have passed from here.
But now the parable.
And see she harken well.

Know then, between us, these
Are woodland mysteries:
And thus a woodland year
Turns like a crystal sphere,
That all ways looked upon
Hath some reflex of sun.
This, if you doubt, go look,
Deep in neighbouring forest nook,
Late winnowing-ground
Of autumn, winter's spongy mound
Of oaken leafage pale and dark
There see inlaid [decayed.
With mould of light & lichen's
The spiry maze, [yellow rays
Field the lavish painter Sun
Hath left his brush upon.

Indeed, if it befell
Mortal to do his task so well,
The Builder's name, [of fame,
Seeing it were written on his house
Easily should that man spare
The tale of idle days to linger there
For to have wrought
So close to the world's thought,
Is ended labour of mortality.
The Master's burden; he
No further way of life discovereth
Saving in death.
What, then; is that a mournful way
Sun goeth to his rest of cloudy day?
Earth is not moved for him,
Nor eyes of that bright service dim

When vestal months pursue
The altar-circle & bright order due
To lunar old decrees.
Birds then, the chief of auguries,
Float o'er the temple-court of earth,
Appearances of timely birth
In pale region & sunless steep of air:
Birds, on the passage there
Of sempiternal rites [those heights,
And rumour earliest breathing in
Follow like cloudlets of Jove's throne
The Queen of Heaven, gone
To annual streams of her virginity:
The fable told in Argos. She,
Consort of not too happy fate [sionate
The Olympian-called, earthly-compas-

Mother of Marriage, June,
Cometh by old Atlantis, bearing boon
To stormy ports of northward sail,
Time when dark Gael
And English islander
Hear in their droning fanes no
word of her.

But she hath heralds all moist ways
Cloudy woodside green, [between
Drear holt & hamlet unawakening:
Birds of sunless daylight sing.
And know not of their task from
morn to eve.
The labourer's sorrowful reprieve.
These are the same

Who on occasion of more fame,
Long-tuning echoes find
In the judicious mortal mind;
When all those tatter-coats of
minstrel-throng
Repair into the highway of their song,
The new-made-happy horde,
A spring-day's journey from their
winter board,
With confidence rehearse
Some new-discovered purpose theirs
Joy to relate,
And the divine cheer of their
human fate.
When as at height of day
Upland skylark making way,

To that concave azure suiting
His runnel pipe, sets shepherd
fluting.
Or blest of wakeful men,
The drenched nocturnal pilgrim, when
In her moon-dusk veil
The starry nightingale,
Priestess of adoring grove,
Leads in sightless tracks of love
The new-found worshipper.
Then not a leaf doth stir
But pulse of song.

This dark day long,
Birds of the sunless times,
These are faint rhymes,

And one by one in hearing wrought
Of leafy chambers of your thought
And towers musical,
Whence letting fall
Many a sweet sound's burden,
These, made for praise or guerdon,
These ye informed have
With substance rich and grave
Of melodies, less sweet than your
notes are,
But scattered far
Like yours, in all world's weather.

Come, Heart, together
This heavy day, let us make cheer,
Seeing the end is near.

And we shall say
Give, give us back our heavy day.
Whether we turn to spell an
olden tale,
Or set dark sail
And enter sparkling gates with
memory,
Or hope, to skim the enamoured sea:
Carriers of silver ocean,
In a vastness wanting motion,
Our birdlike convoys drop away:
Skies of dissolving day,
Great space and sundown sig-
nal re-illuming, bear
Blazon of the immortal way
we fare.:

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